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ABSTRACT

Because of a multiplicity of approaches to small group argument, research in this area often needs to be summarized, condensed, and redirected. Researchers have identified the rational, cognitive and interactive components of argumentation, and have demonstrated that arguments can take several forms and fulfill a variety of functions. The result of combining traditional approaches with more recently identified influences is a socio-cognitive perspective which unites the socially developed influences of the individual and the cognitive response to argument. Such a model considers the presumptions, values, and belief structures of individual interactants as well as the possibilities of conflict and non-conflict directions of argument. Where there is no conflict the group will either offer no argument in reaching a decision or offer arguments to support a proposal and allow the proposal to become the final decision. Where there is conflict group members develop an argumentative style, mode, and structure. The socio-cognitive perspective can guide researchers toward further investigation in small group argument. (A figure of the proposed model is included, and 28 references are appended.) (SG)

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SMALL GROUP ARGUMENT

by

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Introduction

Researchers of small group argumentation have been faced with a variety of issues, insights and concerns. The approaches to group argument as either an instrument or process have historically allowed the researcher to chose from several theories, perspectives and methods to guide their investigations. This multiplicity of approaches, however, has made it difficult to develop a consensus on what really happens when people argue in small groups. Research in this area, therefore, frequently needs to be summarized, condensed and redirected.

Gouran (1985) saw this need and provided a useful catagorization of small group argument research and suggested avenues for future investigation. His evaluation of the research found it lacking in a shared conceptual basis and he noted a "failure of researchers to provide adequate descriptions of the conditions under which argument, in principle, will function in particular ways" (p. 728). Gouran (1985) offered four directions for future research. First, he suggested researchers might view argument as "claims providing bases for choice" (p. 730). Second, the weight that different arguments have in decision-making should be studied. This would lead to a third area of investigation of effective and ineffective decision-making groups. Fourth, he suggested the influence argument has on affective states should be studied.

This paper will examine the literature on group

argument to identify what we know and what we should discover. Specific issues addressed in this paper will include: 1) perspectives on group argument, 2) structure of arguments and 3) function of arguments. A new perspective for the study of small group argument will then be proposed.

Perspectives

Argumentation in small groups has been explored from several perspectives (Gouran, 1985; Hirokawa and Poole, 1986). Gouran (1985) found four historical perspectives in his review of argumentation in small groups: argument as disagreement, argument as a behavioral predisposition, argument as a developmental process and argument as collectively shared inferences. A more theoretical view would suggest that small group argument has been studied from the rational, cognitive and interactional perspectives.

Rational

The rational approach assumes that argument succeeds by presenting data in a logical manner toward a favored inference or conclusion. The rational perspective is similar to O'Keefe's (1977) argument, which offers a static view of argument. From this perspective, the researcher would concentrate solely on the message and not the response it receives. Promises, commands, apologies, warnings and invitations were listed a examples of argument,.

The rational approach also incorparates the,

traditional, rhetorical perspective. When working from this perspective, the researcher would consider group messages to be both strategic and goal oriented. Enos (1981) notes "small group discussion is rhetorical when its function is to resolve problems, secure agreements either as a means of promoting solidarity or attaining a particular task-oriented function" (p. 158).

Researchers who view group argument from the rational perspective have isolated several causes for faulty argument. Hirokawa (1987) sought to examine group interaction to discover reasons for effective and ineffective decision making. This study also found signs of member lazyness when faulty decisions resulted from a lack of vigilance and second guessing. Scheerhorn (1987) added that personality themes is the most predictable reason for group argument avoidance. People who are shy, quiet and lack confidence may avoid argument because they do not enjoy or feel comfortable with the interaction. Others, according to Scheerhorn (1987), may not contribute to a group argument because they consider the topic unimportant or they see no possible way to persuade the other group members. The latter is referred to as the "futility of persuasion" (p. 420).

Cognitive

The cognitive approach assumes that argument consists of all the processes involved in thinking out an argument. These can include: inferences, percpetion, reconstruction

of data and attitudes toward the topic. Hample's (1985) argument addresses the cognitive approach by suggesting that argument includes all of the cognitive processes in thinking out an argument or identifying the need for one.

Scheidel and Crowell (1979) offer the belief that argument grows in groups in either a diverging or converging manner. Diverging argument is that which grows in an outword manner. As positions are presented, other group members think of similar (remember similar) arguments or supporting material. As these are offered, arguments are "unfolded", "analyzed" and "expanded". Converging argument represents a different growth in group argument. As a position is offered, people think of contradictions counter examples or ask for clarification. Through this process, arguments are "synthesized", "refocused" or "eliminated".

Researchers who address group argument from the cognitive perspective find presumption to be a primary cause of faulty argument. Presumption refers to the preferred conclusion and the advantage that conclusion offers (Ice, 1987). Enos (1981) argued that people come to the group setting with individual presumptions about the hypotactic and paratactic modes of argument appropriate for the group. Faulty argument arises when a member does not take into account these group presumptions. This results in the arguer's failure to align his or her topoi with the group presumptions and members thus considering the

arguments invalid. Enos (1981) states "without acknowledging heuristic presuppositions arguments can more easily be waved away, silenced ignored, replaced by arbitrary choice or even force and violence" (p. 724).

Other researchers have furthered the understanding and revealed the difficulties with presumption. Ice (1987) considered presumption to be a group structure and thus identified three truths which should concern group members. First, presumption is unobservable but can be inferred from the group decision making process. Second, presumption guides the decision making process and third it is constrained by member knowledge, historical precedents, and unintended consequences. The burden is on the arguer to present adequate proof to persuade the group membership to reverse their presuppositions, if the advocated position is in contrast to the group stance.

Hirokawa (1987) identified inaccurate information processing and improbable fantasy chains as causes for faulty decisions. These two faults are cognitive functions which would be detected by researchers examining group argument from the cognitive perspective. Hirokawa (1987) found "interactions associated with low-quality decisions were generally characterized by faulty information procession" (p. 17). Faulty information processing would likely hinder group argument, as well as decision making, ability.

Improbable fantasy chains occure when member(s) invision

the group or specific members functioning in a manner inconsistant with group development and its progress toward completing the decision task. Improbable fantasy chains would prohibit the development of successful argument much like working from an inaccurate premise for group discussion.

Interactive

Interactive argument combines the need to study rational argument in the group with the controlling factors of the environment. Interaction, a shared group reality and movement toward a shared reality are important for group researchers who operate from this perspective. These researchers are also faced with two struggels. The researcher must compare the actions of a particular group member as compared to the group norms. The second struggle finds the researcher attempting to identify the change in a particular group members beliefs in comparison to the stability of the group as a whole. This approach is similar to argument$_2$ which considers two or more people working toward a consensus or decision. O'Keefe (1977) considers argument$_2$ to include bull sessions, heart-to-heart talks, quarrels and discussions.

Poole, McPhee and Siebold (1982) offer an interaction based view of group communication. The structuration perspective "is based on the premise that the factors determining social action exist only in the stream of ongoing interaction" (p. 3). This interaction-based

perspective holds that group function depends on the members' use of rules and resources. The authors emphasize that "external factors are not only mediated by interaction, they owe their very existence and seeming stability to their reproduction in interaction" (p. 3). Additionally, the claim is made that structuration stregnthens research potential for small group scholars because non-interactional perspectives emphasize input and structural variables and limit communication to a channel role.

An interactionistic view of small group communication will provide insight into several typical causes of argument failure. Shultz (1983) found that groups valued discussion and especially argumentativeness because it increases interaction and guides the task. However, faulty argument results from an individual attempting to argue with the use of personal attacks on other members. Hirokawa and Pace (1983) found poor quality decisons resulted from not evaluating opinion and suggestions of members, a less thorough evaluation of alternatives, and influential members exerting a negative, inhibitive effect. These findings would also hinder group argument. Scheerhorn (1987) added group (interpersonal) dynamics also cause people to withdraw from argument when the relational or power issues which evolve during the argument process are too intimidating.

Small group argument research has primarily functioned from either the rational, cognitive or interactionistic perspectives. Each perspective will guide the researcher toward different functions of the group process while highlighting other causes for faulty argumentation. The next section will focus more specifically on argument structure.

Structure of Arguments

Previous research has demonstrated that arguments can take several forms. Argument structure may vary according to the number, complexity and function of interaction. This section will identify several argument and negotiation structures.

Canary, Brossmann and Siebold (1987) have identified simple, compound and convergent argument structures used in small decision making groups. Simple arguments are initiated when a group member presents a single assertion then provides evidence to elaborate on the argument. The argument becomes amplified when he or she demonstrates the relevence to the audience and finally justification is provided with a rationale for the argument.

Compound argumentation is the combination of arguments to form a more elaborate position. The authors identified three distinct types of compound arguments. Extended arguments are used when a simple argument is provided and then one arguable is elaborated upon for a more persuasive effect. Embedded argumentation allows a group member to use

one argument to demonstrate the importance of a greater position. Parallel arguments are compound arguments which attempt to make two points at once with the same appeal.

The third type of argument structure is convergent argumentation. This refers to one member's ability to use another's points to support his or her own position. Agreement is one type of convergent argument which allows the member to adopt and adapt another's point. Tag team convergence occures when a subgroup decides to support a particular member and make his or her appeal more persuasive.

Research by Pace (1985) identified the following structures: fixed argument, argument without disagreement and change in position. Pace, further, distinguished between low consensus and high consensus use of these structures.

Fixed patterns occurred when groups centered on a particular position and were unwilling to change. This was seen in low consensus groups when then formed informal coalitions and provided mutual advocacy or mutual counter-advocacy regardless of the issue. Fixed argument patterns were much less frequent in high consensus groups and there was less mutual advocacy. However, mutual advocacy was seen in high consensus groups when there was argument without disagreement. When no counter-argument was provided, these group members would be supportive and provide examples of the position being presented. High

consensus groups were found to be more likely to change their position than their low consensus counterparts. Some members in high consensus groups were found to argue against the position they originally held. Low consensus group members were more likely to repeat their arguments in the face of opposition. Pace (1985) determined that argument functioned as an indication of emerging coalitions in the low consensus groups. Argument in high consensus groups functioned to reinforce developing consensus and to persuade other group members to adopt a position.

The enthymeme has been used to analyze the structure of argument in small groups. Hirokawa (1982) classified arguments as either prototypical, with data and claim clearly provided, or enthymemetic in which either the data or claim is missing. Alderton and Frey (1983b) used a similar coding scheme which identifies the enthymeme as an argument structure. Earlier work by Jackson and Jacobs (1980) called for use of the enthymeme in structuring conversational argument.

Negotiation has also emerged as a means for analyzing the structure of group arguments. Walker (1985) claimed that negotiation exists in a wide range of decision making contexts. His definition of negotiation as "a joint decision-making process in which bargaining parties use arguments to overcome conflicts of interest and achieve an acceptable outcome" (p. 747) would include small group argumentation.

Walker (1985) provided six negotiation structures which can interact in argumentative form. Preference users are those group members who present statements of value. These statements provide reasons for what the negotiator does or does not prefer. The negotiator can also use a cause -effect structure. This allows the member to use causal reasoning to support the claim of preference. This negotiation strategy occures with the greatest frequency (Putnam & Jones, 1982). Power can be used as a negotiation strategy when one attempts to define or redefine power in the negotiation relationship. Threats and promises are characteristic of power arguments. Normative arguments are those which appeal to societal standards. The negotiator would attempt to allign his or her position with a societal status quo when using this structure. Self-presentation arguments are those which support one in his or her own position. This is a broad catagory and preference, cause-effect and normative arguments may also be self-preservation arguments. The final negotiation argument is the bluff. The group member who employs this will attempt to persuade the target based on an illusory conception of who has the power in the group.

This section has reviewed the recent knowledge claims which apply to argument structure in small groups. Researchers have identified structures ranging from basic assertions to examples of individual creativity and complexity with compound arguments. Negotiation has been

applied to the small group context along with its specific argumentative forms. Small group argument in the 1980's has also continued to recognize the enthymemtic structure of arguments.

Functions of Argument

Research in small group argumentation has shown the argumentative function of interaction to concern more than the use of persuasive strategies for idea proliferation. Argument in small groups also serves to improve relations and build solidarity. This section will review the functions of group argument with the following three catagories: 1) general functions, 2) functions in negotiation and bargaining and 3) functions in polarization.

Hirokawa and Scheerhorn (1985) found seven functions of argument in recent group deliberation research. Two of these functions dealt with influence or persuasion while the final five were oriented toward interpersonal satisfaction and group solidarity.

Advocacy and discovery are used by group members to influence their peers. Advocacy is used to bring about opinion change by group members who use persuasion to encourage others to accept or reject claims. This aspect of group argument was also noted by Dace and Hirokawa (1987). Discovery occures when the group uses argument to create a shared social reality with the membership.

Relationship management, impression management, clarification, unification and norming are all argument

functions used by groups to maintain interpersonal satisfacton and group solidarity. Argument within the group can alter a member's relationship with another because it forces one to reveal attitudes and values toward the issue being discussed. If the attitutudes and values are complimentary the two members will be brought together, otherwise they may express differences. The argument that evolves during group interaction will also help a group member with self-perception. The insight one gains will affect how they view their relationship with others in the group.

Clarification by the group, through argument, will help individuals understand their stance on a particular position and the reasoning behind it. This clarification of one's position then fosters understanding among group members. Dace and Hirokawa (1987) also found that clarification was a function of high solution groups. Unification brings group members together when they agree on positions and develop consensus. Norming, the final form of argument, functions by developing norms and proceedures through argument. The group, as a whole, will develop a consensus for what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Putnam and Jones (1982) assert that argument serves four functions in negotiation situations. Predictably, argument was found to assist in information exchange and expression of strategic information. Argument also helps to coordinate

group outcomes and identify patterns of behaviors in the group. Assisting in these functions, Putnan and Geist (1985) found that group members relied minimally on the traditional argumentative strengths of hard data and facts. Reasoning from analogy, cause and hypothetical example were used with greater frequency.

Relationship form, potential outcome and rules of interaction also effect the way argument will function in a group (Donohue, Diez & Stahle, 1983). The relationship between negotiators, such as their knowledge of each other, mutual negotiating experience and respective sides of the issue, influence their argument abilities. Likewise, the desire to negotiate and established interaction rules can help or hinder the negotiation process. Walker (1985) added that power, risk, compromise, prediction and situational constraints will come into play during argument in negotiations.

Polarization is a third function of small group argumentation which has attracted the attention of many researchers. Alderton and Frey (1985) refer to group polarization as the propensity for individual' average post-discussion position to be more extreme, but in the same direction indicated by their average prediscussion positions" (p. 163).

Mayor (1987) found that persuasive arguments can cause choice shifts and, to a lesser degree, knowing how others feel about an issue can lead to a decision change. Vinokur

and Burnstein (1978) added that arguments which are viewed as being valid and novel will be more effective in creating a choice shift. Kirchler and Davis (1986) maintain that group members of lower status are more likely to change their opinion.

Hirokawa and Poole (1986) and Alderton and Frey (1983) both indicate that reactions to arguments may be as important as the argument in determining the polarization of the group. Responses to the arguments will indicate how the group will progress in decision making. Although neither the number of majority nor minority arguments were corrolated to degree of polarity (Alderton and Frey, 1983) majority arguments generate more favorable thoughts than minority arguments (Boster and Mayor, 1984). Less polarization was also seen when the group provided positive respones to minority arguments but greater polarization occured when negative responses to minority arguments were generated (Alderton and Frey, 1983). Hirokawa and Poole (1986) suggest that merely presenting minority views in group discussions may be ineffective for group development. Instead, they advise members to also present rationale for the minority views to present unfounded polarization.

The argument process has been shown to function in a variety of ways in small groups. It allows for information exchange in a variety of ways such as advocacy and discovery. But it also aids in developing group consensus and maintaining social functions of the group.

Coordinating outcomes, unification and norming, for example, have been discovered as functions of the group.

Socio-Cognitive Perspective

The state of the art in small group argumentation research calls for a reformulation of available perspectives to guide future research. The study of argument should combine the more traditional approaches with more recently identified influences. The result is a socio-cognitive perspective which will unite the socially developed influences of the individual and the cognitive response to argument in one view of small group argumentation.

Small group argument must maintain the view that members employ rhetorical tactics, such as enthymemtic argument structure, and other components typically found in the argument$_1$ perspective. However, our knowledge of the argument process has moved beyond the argument$_1$, argument$_2$ and argument$_0$ views to suggest that researchers should consider the beliefs, values and ideals that interactants hold before the initial discussion begins. Likewise, group members infer a specific meaning from the argument in groups and his or her manner of interpretation of evidence should also be considered by small group researchers.

The model in Appendix 1 represents the socio-cognitive perspective of small group argumentation. It shows the argument process a small group will follow when making a decision. It includes the possibility of argument with and

without conflict and the individual thought processes of members developing their arguments.

Initially, before interaction begins, group members will enter the situation with their individual presumptions, values and belief structures. Presumption was initially addressed as a means of faulty argument because interlocuters do not realize that group members do not enter the argumentative situation with an open mind. Presumption does not always have to lead to faulty argument but should be considered an aspect of the process and should be studied. Additionally, pre-argument considerations should evaluate the value and belief structures of each member. Interesting research findings might be garnered from the study of how value conflict among group members affects argument construction and style.

With the presentation of the decision issue, discussion has been shown to proceed in either a conflict or non-conflict direction. If there is no conflict, the group will either offer no argument and reach a decision or develop arguments which support and illustrate the proposal and allow the proposal to become the final decision.

However, when argument results in conflict, the group researcher can be drawn to several research possibilities. With conflict, group members develop an argumentative style mode and structure. We have not sufficiently examined the relationship between pre-argument dispositions and the selection of a particular style or mode of argument. One

might allow argumentation research to suggest that individuals are predisposed to a particular level of high or low argument. Small group researchers may be interested in the possibility of specific presumptions, value or belief structures causing an alteration in the argument style or structure. The interaction of pre-argument disposition, argument structure and argument style blend to create a particular meaning for each group member. This cognitive assimiliation of various inputs has been touched on with the development of inferences but does not attempt to explain how specific elements from each area correlate into a specific meaning.

The meaning, or function, of arguments include not only the, predictable, influence attempts but has also been shown to apply to social maintainence of the group and general understanding of the issue being discussed. The most interesting avenue of research in the function of argument may be in how members balance the social and influence function to win acceptence of their proposal. Members seeking leadership were seen to put much more emphasis on the social function but the selection of argument structure and style to create the right balance between social and influence concerns in a particular argument has not been addressed.

This paper has attempted to assess the understanding of small group argument by examining the perspectives, structure and functions identified by communication

researchers. Knowledge claims from these areas were used to develop a new socio-cognitive perspective of group argument. This perspective is offered as a new method for viewing group argument. The socio-cognitive perspective should also guide researchers toward issues in small group argument which need to be investigated.

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